

# POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

**Keeper of the Gate.** Selwa "Lucky" Roosevelt. *Simon & Schuster, \$21.95.* For seven hectic years, "Lucky" Roosevelt was U.S. Chief of Protocol—the Emily Post of the State Department, guardian of the nation's manners.

When she stepped down in 1989, she had served longer than any other chief; had hobnobbed and traveled with royalty; wined, dined, and yachted with the rich and celebrated; seated thousands of dinners; attended untold receptions; presided over innumerable state visits and official functions; and indulged the whims of potentates and presidents. She had also dealt with the daily problems of the diplomatic corps, supervised the multi-million dollar renovation of Blair House, and most of all, tried to please an enigmatic Nancy Reagan, whom she refers to as a "perfectionist."

All of the above, plus her own ambition and determination to rise to the top, are described in this somewhat pretentious memoir, which offers up a number of amusing anecdotes and stories but is marred by an overabundance of self-flattering tributes, letters, and comments.

There is no doubt that Lucky Roosevelt knows the nuances of the capital—how to pull strings and get things done. The daughter of Lebanese immigrants, she was raised in Tennessee, won a scholarship to Vassar, and gained entree to the highest social echelons after a whirlwind courtship and marriage to the late Archibald Roosevelt, a former CIA honcho and grandson of the legendary T.R. (Her depiction of her humble Arabic origins and her climb to the exalted world of super WASPs, with all their pride, privacy, and stinginess, is among the most compelling parts of the book.)

A stint in the fifties covering Embassy Row for *The Washington Star*, and later writing travel articles for *Town & Country*, added to her knowledge of the *haute monde* and the dos and don'ts of polite society.

It was a luncheon she gave for Nancy Reagan in the early 1980s, however, that placed her firmly on the political/social map. Shortly thereafter, Roosevelt, a die-hard Republican, wrote a column for *The Washington Post* in which she attacked the press for its criticism of the First Lady and implored the media to give Nancy Reagan a break.

"When are you going to stop expecting her to conform to certain criteria to please the fourth estate—criteria, I might add, that change as frequently as the hemline and seem just as capricious?" she wrote.

Several months later, Roosevelt was offered the protocol slot and Nancy Reagan dubbed her "my first defender."

Despite this attention, Roosevelt puzzles over Mrs. Reagan's lack of congeniality. She notes that the First Lady never complimented her on her work and says their relationship was strictly business, nothing more, always "cordial and correct."

Roosevelt is no shrinking violet, but this is not a knife job or a backstabbing tale. There is no scandal, no scuttlebutt, no startling revelation. She does not blot her copy book by lashing out, preferring instead to heap plaudits on those with whom she established a rapport and to dismiss others as obstructionist and uninformed.

White House advance men fall into the latter category and are singled out for special ire. Her problems with these macho types began the first day on the job, and she labels them "munchkins," "mice," and "little shits."

There are glowing sketches of former Secretary of State George Schultz, George and Barbara Bush, Ronald Reagan, Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, Malcolm Forbes (whose yacht she frequented), and the Crown Prince and Princess of Japan.

Roosevelt reveals the secret of Margaret Thatcher's stamina—she requires only four hours of sleep a night. She also compliments her

thoughtfulness, her good manners, and commends her practicality. "Unlike most male heads of state, Mrs. Thatcher traveled light. Her entourage was the smallest we ever dealt with. She was so secure emotionally and intellectually, she did not need hordes of tom-tom beaters to impress people with her importance."

According to Roosevelt, female heads of state, like Thatcher, were often savvier and more assured than their male counterparts and, to achieve their goals, always ready to employ their feminine wiles. One is therefore baffled at the end of the book when Roosevelt suggests her successor be male. Her reason? The position was being downgraded because it was perceived as "a woman's job." A female can never be "one of the boys," she notes plaintively.

—Sandra McElwaine

**In the Time of the Tyrants: Panama, 1968-1989.** R. M. Koster, Guillermo Sánchez Borbon. *Norton, \$22.95.* Yet another book on Panama! After the appearance earlier this year of John Dinges's *Our Man in Panama* and Frederick Kempe's *Divorcing the Dictator*, there would seem little left to say about this tropical outpost of two million people. Among Panamawatchers, though, this new volume has been much anticipated. Unlike Dinges and Kempe—both American journalists—Koster and Sánchez are longtime residents of Panama who have participated in the bizarre events shaking that country.

Koster, an American novelist who moved to Panama many years ago, is best known outside the country for his cameo appearance in Graham Greene's *Getting to Know the General*. In that book, Greene, preparing to attend a party, is warned about an American "who would certainly turn up whether he was invited or not—a writer called Koster who lived in Panama City and was supposed to be a CIA agent." Hmm. Sánchez, a native Panamanian, is a popular

columnist with *La Prensa*, Panama's most important and courageous newspaper. A relentless foe of Manuel Noriega, Sánchez was forced into exile in 1985. In 1987-1988, he collaborated with Koster on two articles about Panama for *Harper's*. Vividly written and boldly argued, the pieces helped galvanize anti-Noriega sentiment in this country. *In the Time of the Tyrants* grew out of those earlier articles.

Noriega is not the chief tyrant in this account. Anyone looking for new dirt on the drug-running dictator and his ties to Washington will be disappointed. The focus instead is on Omar Torrijos, the charismatic, mercurial general who ruled Panama from 1968 until his death in a helicopter crash in 1981. It's a timely topic. Since the U.S. invasion, *Torrijismo* has been the subject of intense political debate in Panama. The government of Guillermo Endara, intent on eradicating all vestiges of the military regime, has gone after Torrijos with a vengeance, casting him as the despoiler of Panamanian democracy. Among its first acts, the government dropped Torrijos's name from the international airport in Panama City. But a small vocal group of Noriega loyalists and left-leaning politicians and intellectuals is upholding Torrijos's memory. To them, Torrijos was a nationalist hero who spoke for the Panamanian masses while standing up to the United States.

Koster and Sánchez are squarely in the anti-memorial camp. *In the Time of the Tyrants* represents a concerted—one might say obsessive—effort to demolish the Torrijos legend. The general comes off as a nasty, brutish thug, interested mostly in screwing—his own country as much as beautiful women. When the Shah of Iran, ailing and alone, seeks refuge abroad, Torrijos almost alone among world leaders agrees to take him in—then makes repeated passes at his comely wife. While professing love for the campesino, Torrijos arranges the murder of a popular priest trying to help the poor. The general holds fraudulent elections, rigidly controls the press, and jails his political opponents. Throughout it all, he drinks to excess. Jack Vaughn, the U.S. ambassador to Panama in the early 1960s,

saw Torrijos on some 50 occasions, we learn, not once finding him sober.

In the view of Koster and Sánchez, nothing Torrijos did deserves praise. Not the introduction of a new labor code—"it was destined to hurt production and swell unemployment." Not the reform of the nation's health-care system—"equality was achieved all right, but at lower standards." Not even the Panama Canal treaties. Regaining control of the canal had long been Panama's single overriding goal, and Torrijos's success in negotiating it won praise from even his fiercest critics. Not Koster and Sánchez, though. "Panama was (and still is) a country with cancer, a conquered land pillaged by vandals," the authors write in typically purple form. "Anything that might have benefited Panama had Panama been healthy, had it been free, merely fed the cancer, strengthened the barbarians." Koster and Sánchez discern only one real achievement in Torrijos's 13-year rule—turning a major thoroughfare in Panama City from a two-way into a one-way street, thereby easing traffic congestion.

This is far too grudging. Torrijos was certainly a tyrant, and the authors have performed a service in chronicling his excesses, especially now that efforts are afoot to rehabilitate him. In their zeal to tear him down, however, Koster and Sánchez have distorted the past. In spite of his misdeeds, Torrijos embodied a critical development in Panamanian history—the breaking of the white oligarchy's lock on economic and political power. Until Torrijos arrived on the scene, Panama's *mestizo* (mixed race) population—70 percent of the total—had little say in running the country. Torrijos brought many *mestizos* into his administration, and his reforms, though often stillborn, did reflect the broad aspirations of the Panamanian people. Anyone who today attempts to turn back the clock and exclude this group from power risks provoking an explosion. It remains to be seen whether the Endara government—largely white and well-heeled—grasps this. Koster and Sánchez certainly don't.

In one of their *Harper's* articles, Koster and Sánchez described in chill-

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ing detail the murder of Hugo Spadafora, a leading Noriega antagonist. They have incorporated that account into their new book. Noriega's agents, they relate, after beating Spadafora at length, took a sharp knife and made two deep cuts on the inside of each of his legs, from just above the knee to mid-thigh. The point "was to disable his thigh muscles so that he couldn't close his legs and disturb the pleasure they meant to take of him." The autopsy, they continue, "found Spadafora's testicles monstrously swollen, the result (it seems) of prolonged [torture]. And something was jammed up his rectum, a pole of some sort. The autopsy found his rectum massively damaged."

A horrible, horrible end. When the account of it first appeared in *Harper's*, it caused quite a stir. But John Dinges, researching the matter further for his own book, discovered some discrepancies: "A lurid description of Spadafora's alleged sexual tortures is contained in an article in *Harper's*, June 1988. . . . The central, gruesome detail is that Spadafora's leg muscles were severed in order to keep him from closing his knees during the torture. The alleged cuts to the inner thighs were not mentioned in the autopsy or in [a prominent doctor's] analysis. The autopsy records no trauma at all to the genitals or anus, although it notes the presence of hemorrhoids. . . ."

Dinges's book appeared more than six months before this one, allowing ample time for rebuttal. Koster and Sánchez offer none, raising further questions about the accuracy of theirs.

—Michael Massing

**Good Intentions: How Big Business and the Medical Establishment Are Corrupting the Fight Against AIDS.** Bruce Nussbaum. *Atlantic Monthly Press*, \$19.95. In critiquing the medical-industrial complex and the orthodox old-boy AIDS network, *Good Intentions* adds to the history of AIDS, bringing to life the people who shepherded the drug AZT from laboratory to patient. Nussbaum thoroughly records their smelly backroom deals, bureaucratic botchings, conflicts of interest, and peccadillos. He also chastises the powers-that-be for

ignoring (and deep-sixing) drugs other than AZT and toasts the researchers and people infected with the AIDS virus who bucked the system and started their own community-based drug trial programs. And Nussbaum's business writing seems largely on the mark, which is to be expected from a veteran *BusinessWeek* hand. He convincingly shows how the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) favors pharmaceutical giants like Burroughs Wellcome over underfunded startup companies that have interesting products but can't afford the regulatory process. The way Burroughs's David Barry sailed AZT through the regulatory doldrums of the FDA, his old employer, is a classic it's-who-you-know tale. Yet Nussbaum undermines his credibility with error after error, sullyng the genuine facts in the book.

The biggest hoot comes early on. "It is a polite fiction that scientists at the NIH [National Institutes of Health] and the drug companies work for the public health," Nussbaum posits. "They really work for credit and cash." As Nussbaum himself might say in the flabbergasted voice he maintains throughout *Good Intentions*: Shocking.

While NIH scientists should always put the public good above their own gain, since when are drug companies held to that standard? Burroughs Wellcome's original \$10,000-a-year asking price for AZT was offensively high, but so are the price tags on plenty of other drugs (cyclosporin, which prevents the rejection of transplanted tissue, costs \$13,000 a year). The fact is, in the U.S., health care is a for-profit industry. Nussbaum doesn't analyze whether this is good or bad, opting to attack the symptoms rather than the disease.

Three pages later, Nussbaum gets his medical history wrong. "In the fifties," he claims, "it was polio that received the big government research bucks." Not so. In the fifties, as Jane S. Smith details in her new book *Patenting the Sun: Polio and the Salk Vaccine*, the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis/March of Dimes funded the bulk of the polio research. She cites congressional testimony in which an NIH director noted that in 1953 the NIH spent \$72,000 on polio research, while the private, volunteer

National Foundation spent nearly \$2 million. Indeed, the National Foundation deserves most of the credit for "conquering" polio. Nussbaum's mistake is not a minor historical inaccuracy: The private funding of polio research raises an intriguing, big-picture question about the role of the federal government in the search for a cure for AIDS, a question he skips.

But time and again a scientific—not a historical—error breaks the book's momentum. This is just a further reminder of how, because complicated topics are easy to screw up, science has long been the journalist's bane. Many major dailies now assign MDs and PhDs to their medical beats. Some publications with long lead times have researchers vet their science articles. And reporters often read or fax technical passages to their subjects before going to press.

Nussbaum's science reporting fails on two levels: when he does it and when he doesn't. For most of *Good Intentions*, Nussbaum assiduously avoids the wily nature of the AIDS virus and the obstacles that drugs combating the microbe must overcome. The strategy might work for an article in a business magazine, but for a book recounting scientific tales, it chips away at his authority. More troubling still, when Nussbaum does delve into science, he's often embarrassingly wrong on important issues.

According to Nussbaum, the scientists at Burroughs Wellcome, the company that marketed (and, depending on your point of view, developed) AZT, "didn't know" how the drug worked. Says who? While Burroughs Wellcome may have had difficulty proving exactly what AZT did in the body, to say the company didn't know how the drug worked is hyperbole. Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), the causative agent of AIDS, infects cells and then replicates. There are 15 steps in this process, one of which AZT interrupts, stopping HIV's replication. To spare you the details, scientists have a solid idea which of these steps AZT interferes with and how the drug does its thing. As Nussbaum even reveals at one point, the scientist who invented AZT in the early sixties, Jerome Horwitz, had a good hunch about the drug's mechanism of action—though he couldn't